DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 177 551 CS 205 155

TITLE	Language and Learning in the Humanities. Papers from a Seminar with Humanities Teachers (Essex, England, February, 1975).
INSTITUTION	London Univ. (England). Inst. of Education.; Schools Council, London (England).
PUB DATE	76
NOTE	49p.; For related documents, see CS 205 154-161
AVAILABLE FROM	Export Department, Ward Lock Educational, 116 Baker St., London W1M 2BB, England ($10.00 plus $1.00 postage, for entire set; individual copies are not available)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Composition (Literary); Educational Games; Foreign Countries; Geography Instruction; History Instruction; *Humanities; Language Usage; Learning Theories; Secondary Education; *Student Teacher Relationship; Teaching Techniques; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS	*Composition Process; England; *Writing Across the Curriculum Project (England)

ABSTRACT

This is one in a series of eight discussion pamphlets produced by the Writing Across the Curriculum Project dealing with some of the issues connected with writing in the schools and their relation to learning. The eight papers in the pamphlet were drawn from a seminar involving 11 geography, history, and English teachers and are concerned with ways of making learning more accessible to more students more of the time. The first two papers deal with ways in which students and teachers might work together more closely, while the following three papers are concerned with geography games in integrated studies and with the language use that such games encourage. The next two papers deal with "opening up" history and with an account of tape recording students as a means of helping them to "relive the past." The final paper suggests that "poetic" writing is important in all subjects and explains why. (FL)

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SCHOOLS COUNCIL PROJECT
WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM 11-16

Language and Learning in the Humanities

ED177551

CS 205/555

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ISBN 0 7062 3569 x

First issued by the Project 1975
First published in this edition 1976

Acknowledgments

Language and Learning in the Humanities was produced as a result of a seminar held at Wansfell College in Essex. The work of the following contributors is gratefully acknowledged:

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Obtainable from:

Export Department, Ward Lock Educational,
116 Baker St., London, W1M 2BB, England.

Printed by
Robert MacLehose and Company Limited, Glasgow
for Ward Lock Educational,
116 Baker Street, London, W1M 2BB

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Writing Across the Curriculum 11-16

Language and Learning in the Humanities

PAPERS FROM A SEMINAR WITH HUMANITIES TEACHERS

Contents

Introduction Page 3

1. *Cooperative Learning*

   Cooperative Learning
   by Peter Medway and Ivor Goodson 4

   A Language for Life—or School?
   by Bryan Newton 10

2. *Games in Geography*

   The Use of Geographical Games in Integrated Studies
   by Sue Matthews 17

   Further Thoughts
   by Elaine Cockbill 19

   Towards a Language Criterion for Geography Games
   by John Beynon 23

3. *Opening-up History*

   Can Pupils Be Historians?
   by Adrian Chrismas 32

   A First Attempt at Taping
   by Graham Allnatt 39

4. *Poetic Writing and Thinking*

   Some Comments and Hypotheses
   by Robert Parker 45

INTRODUCTION

Like our 'Writing in Science' pamphlet this collection of writings was a planned outcome from a Seminar at Wansfell College in Essex. In February 1975, a Group of 11 teachers from geography, history and English met together for a weekend to discuss aspects of humanities teaching. They formulated their own questions in group discussion, identified their areas of concern and worked on them individually or, if their interests coincided, with each other. These papers are some of the outcomes, which we hope will help other teachers.

The contents of this pamphlet divide into four sections.

Section 1, contains two articles concerned with ways in which students and teachers might work together more closely.

Section 2, is concerned with geography games in integrated studies and with the language use which such games may encourage.

Section 3, is about history–how can it be 'open'? And then is an account of an attempt at tape recording with 3rd year children.

Section 4, suggests that 'poetic' writing is important in *all* subjects–and says why.

The thread running through all these papers is a concern with how to make learning more accessible to more students more of the time.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Peter Medway and Ivor Goodson

Imagine this situation—a teacher with a group in his classroom. He spends two mornings and two afternoons with them each week. He has set up a room that reflects many of his interests and his predictions of what might interest his students. There are photographs and paintings on the wall, a record-player and records, a tape-recorder, paints and brushes, as well as books and resource kits. It's a deliberately designed environment for learning.

It's noticeable that the teacher relates differently to different groups and individuals. Some he leaves alone, with others he sits down and looks at what they've done and makes vague situation-maintaining remarks. "Yes, that's good, go on". With others he's engaged in specific and animated point-by-point argument, explanation, planning, disagreement. With one group he appears serious, with others the relationship seems to be conducted through jokes, insults and repartee.

What is going on is cooperative learning—cooperation between teacher and student. There is also cooperation among the students, but we want to single out the relationship between the teacher and either individual students or small groups of friends. It's cooperative in that teacher and student look at a topic together, each presenting their own view to the other, feeling their way through dialogue towards a common perception.

Cooperation is not a euphemism, a gentler way of doing the same old thing, only by persuasion rather than imposition. The implied equality is meant to be taken seriously. The learning relationship, starting on the teacher's side with a commitment to reciprocity, progresses (when all goes well) to the point where it is experienced as a reality.

A cooperative learning experience that reaches the crucial

learning threshold might pass through three stages. After "browsing" in the "environment" the student eventually says "I want to do something on the Second World War." He gets the reply "O.K. Get started. Here's some books and magazines, there's a filmstrip you can look at." Then follows a period during which the teacher can feel quite anxious about what's going on. There may be a lot of copying out of books, drawing pictures, unrelated bits and pieces of knowledge being collected–useless knowledge it may seem, and so it may be. But what may be going on is a process of exploration in which the student, often unconsciously, feels around the topic to locate the real source of its attraction for him–some difficulty or worry or preoccupation or powerful feeling relating to it.

The teacher watches all this and tries to detect underlying themes and concerns in the student's busy activity. At the same time he tries to gently maintain it and restrain himself from criticism. By now the student is beginning to get clearer about what it is in the topic that really interests him and tries to bring it into focus. "So what you're really on about is the casual pointless way people could get killed, in ways that couldn't make any sense to them. You live your whole life, have an education, a family, fillings in your teeth, and end up in a ditch after some minor skirmish with an unimportant enemy outpost that was going to withdraw one minute later anyway." The teacher goes on to suggest further ways of exploring this central interest.

The student is now experiencing the satisfaction of successfully getting into the topic for himself and bringing it under control. He's developed tenacity and perseverance, makes statements he can back up, suggests hypotheses with confidence, and can improvise from knowledge.

The project is out of the intensive care unit and can be subjected to rough handling–the teacher can speak his mind without fear of killing it stone dead or putting the student down. The relationship has become robust and stimulating to both sides. The student is interested in the teacher's opinion of his work, enjoys his company and challenges him: the teacher has got interested in the student and the topic (about which he

now knows a lot more than he did). Both now feel the mutuality which started off as an abstract ideal.

This is the stage of synthesis. The student has a perspective on the whole topic which may be expressed in a piece of writing that integrates generalizations, facts, attitudes and his whole view of the world. The final writing or presentation will express the dynamic vigour of the reconstruction of knowledge that has gone on.

This example shows what may happen to the inquiry mode of learning in a cooperative classroom context, but we would expect to find the same sort of stages where the learning mode consisted of, say, the writing of stories or poems. Here, too, there is often a theme or general underlying question running through a series of superficially unconnected pieces of writing. The location and definition and exploration of this theme constitute the breakthrough into learning that we are after.

Such a theme can only work itself to the surface where the student has the initiative in undertaking pieces of writing and in dictating the sequence. It can only happen where a teacher is not imposing tasks and the student is free to undertake the activity which seems right to him at the time, even though he cannot justify it. Which is not, of course, to say that the creation of these conditions guarantees that learning will then occur—only that it then has a chance to.

Many teachers looking at this set-up would be worried. The students are deciding on the context of the course. How does the teacher ensure that all the learning isn't trivial, that important things are brought to the student's attention and learnt about, that the student doesn't remain in ignorance of vast areas of human knowledge?

We would question the assumption which always seems to lie behind statements of this kind of worry—that the prevailing mode of teaching is somehow immune from such criticism, and actually achieves balance, seriousness and so on. While there are thousands of teachers who make lists of the important things

their students should know, and design courses accordingly, they rarely make them stick in the classroom. The "important things" don't end up known–not to most students, not in any real sense. The scheme of knowledge (or of awareness of sensitivities) in the teacher's head simply does not reappear intact in the heads of the 30 students. He can decide what he likes, but it's all to no avail if the student doesn't go along with it.

The teacher may have a strong sense of what is important and what is trivial, but in practice he's dependent on what the student finds important–and that's a matter of deep personal response and not of intellectual assent to the teacher's "good reasons" for studying whatever it is. The teacher may make decisions about what to teach, but the student decides what is learnt–and he may at one and the same time not be learning most of what the teacher teaches, and be intensively and actively learning things of which the teacher has no inkling. The glaring fact about contemporary school life is surely the predominant failure of teachers to teach many children the things they consider everyone should know.

Students in fact take up from the teacher's material whatever meshes with their idiosyncratic concerns and interests at the moment. With the rest they either go through the motions in a perfunctory way; or "learn" conscientiously and then, because they have found no personal meaning in the learning, proceed to forget it again; or reject outright.

What needs explaining is why teachers persist in teaching their own content when the failure rate is so conspicuously high. Scheme after systematic, structured scheme is rolled to the front, no sooner to be committed to action than it is revealed yet again to be completely at the mercy of those it was supposed to bring under its control. The teacher watches dismayed or even, sometimes, carries on completely oblivious as it gets dismantled, rearranged, cannibalized, customized, transmuted and subverted by the subjective perceptions and motivations of the army of individual students. Bits are carried off for uses never intended by the manufacturer, materials from outside get welded on, whole systems of intricate machinery are tossed

nonchalantly on the scrapheap. And the teachers, never giving up, go back to the drawing board—to produce Mark N of the same vehicle.

Maybe it is because experience has taught them to have low expectations of success. Children being what they are, you will never grab more than 40 per cent. Or it may be the illusion we all carry round with us that we can eliminate the failures if only we are given a little longer, if we work at it a bit harder, present the stuff a bit differently, use better material. It is a myth: we cannot and we do not. The model is wrong. Because it does not allow constructive feedback, it works against positive identification of individual failures to learn, and hence against any redefinition that such identification might suggest.

What is learnt should be what is important, and not what is trivial. This aim is not achieved by most teaching, but it stands a chance with cooperative learning. But we would want to look very critically at the idea of "important knowledge". We do not feel able to specify it in terms of topics, nor do we think any topic is intrinsically either important or trivial. Important knowledge is knowledge that is mobilized in the attempt to answer big questions: questions that are general in scope, that concern the pattern rather than the detail, that are about things that affect many men rather than a few, a lot of the world rather than a bit.

We maintain that all children are not only capable of being interested in these questions, but actually at some level want to know the answers to them. They want to know what the world is and what they are in it. Many older people have become numbed and incurious: they long ago lost confidence in their ability to make sense of more than their own corner of the world. For this, schools are partly to blame: by presenting knowledge in inappropriate forms as something fixed and established, to which you have a duty rather than which is there for you, they have prevented the possibility of its being seen as the very thing the child is looking for, the means of answering his unspoken questions.

Cooperative learning, unlike the prevailing methods, allows the student to "come to terms" with the school. He can come to to understand by experience and through dialogue how teachers deal with "knowledge". The teacher's knowledge is not something massive and fixed: it can be challenged and reinterpreted in ways that reveal new meaning for both student and teacher. The cooperation is a spiral process. The student kicks the ideas around, comes back to the teacher with a new set of questions, the teacher applies his knowledge to the student's problem, thus restructuring it for himself, the student takes it away again, and so on.

In secondary schools the student is seldom given the opportunity to come to terms in this way. Every time the bell rings, a new prepackaged and predigested segment appears. The assumption is that somehow the student understands the rationale for the learning pattern, or does not need to understand it; he already knows, or he can manage without knowing until PhD stage, why history, biology and French hold the key to his understanding of the world.

In the traditional school the tension between the knowledge, values and perceptions of teacher and taught often occasions deep conflict, or at least mutual incomprehension. In cooperative learning this tension, the disparity of views, is acknowledged, becomes an object of attention for both parties, and in fact provides much of the dynamic for the learning process– which in turn is now seen in its true light, as much more a matter of changing the way one represents the world to oneself than of simply receiving new information. Consequently the teacher has to learn to accord the student's knowledge and perceptions the same status and validity as his own, and to realize that, against all that his upbringing and training have told him, "academic learning", far from being synonymous with education, may often be the least hopeful starting-point for establishing an educational situation in the classroom.

This article first appeared in the *Times Educational Supplement* for 20.6.75.

A LANGUAGE FOR LIFE - OR SCHOOL?

Bryan Newton

John Colclough, the head of geography at Garth High School, Morden, was unable to join the Wansfell Seminar but instead he sent some writing which he had asked his 4th and 5th year students to do on 'The Importance of Language in Education'. 'Asked' is not the usual educational euphemism—the students were free to write or not. John gave very little explanation although in the case of the 5th year students he did suggest they define 'language' and 'education' and try to marry the two together—but there is little observable effect on the writing. He was pleased with the response—he received 33 pieces of writing.

In most of the writing there is an impressive confidence—not so much in what is said as in the manner of saying it—a sense of putting forward a valid point of view based on the writer's experience and knowledge. Only one girl expressed the anxiety that she had perhaps not satisfied the expectations of the teacher—that there might be a right answer which she hadn't found:

> When we were given this piece of work, I did not understand it fully, but I was asked to write my opinion—so here it is—even if it is not quite the work that was required.
>
> (Annabelle)

The power of the school as an institution was also evident in a number of responses which suggested the inseparableness of the school and education:

> In order to incresae your vocabulary you must increase your knowledge, and you only receive this new knowledge at school, where you

are educated . . . Education is where your teacher explains certain facts to you.

(Paul)

This view of education reached its logical conclusion with the final statement from another student that

It finally winds up in his examinations, whether 'O' or 'A' levels or University degrees he must be able to make it clear what he is saying or his years of education could be wasted.

(Martin)

However, a more philosophical view identified a separation between school learning and other learning:

To me education is very important. We never stop learning things all the time we have experiences, experience is learning. So, we can be educated by our senses, we remember our experiences and feelings. This broadens our outlook on life and is very important because it helps us to appreciate the quality of life. The other type of education is what basically we learn in school, that is factual events etc. These give us satisfaction in knowing them and we can be tested *exactly* to see what we know.

(David)

The view of school learning as essentially concerned with facts which have to be remembered was reflected in the number of comments on the language of teachers and textbooks. If the game is transmission of information then at least it should be efficiently played. Some students thought that it wasn't:

A teacher can go on and on about something using long complicated sentences and words, which some, but not all of the class might not understand the meaning, and at the end the class might not have fully grasped the lesson. What is the point of this. The class might say that this teacher knows his or her subject inside out, but when they are trying to pass it on to thirty students at a time, and it is not fully understood what is being taught, then it is a complete waste of time. That one person is not giving the benefit of his knowledge to all the students he or she is teaching.

(Paul)

This raises not only the question of whose language–the teacher's or the pupil's?–but also the usefulness of this method of instruction as the only way of conducting lessons.

Another student made a similar point:

> Teachers when giving notes or explaining a theory, have the annoying habit of doing one of two things. They either use words which the pupils have never heard before and therefore do not know the meaning and unless they ask the teacher does not tell them but expects them to know. The other fault of the teacher is the complete opposite–they often talk and treat the pupil as though he is an infant school pupil and not a fifth form high school student.
>
> (Alan)

Teachers who habitually dictate notes are also criticized:

> In one lesson the teacher . . . just dictates to us at such a fast speed we don't have time to absorb the notes and as we don't know what we are writing it becomes very dull and boring.
>
> (Janice)

Another student put it more poetically:

> It is absolutely no good just writing reams of notes which only superficially enter one's brain. So many lessons become set in this pattern –the content of the notes is not remembered and the wasted paper serves only as a reminder of the wasted hours.
>
> (Karen)

However, the students did not merely criticize negatively what went on in their lessons. Arising from their comments on the teachers' language and methods they made positive suggestions for improvements. These took a variety of forms. Sometimes the contrast was made between what was seen as good and bad in the teaching they experienced, as in this comment–still on note-taking:

> I find that when a teacher dictates notes, they are much harder to understand, than a teacher who does not. As he or she, whatever

the case may be, has their own way of writing the information, and sometimes it can be somewhat of a problem to understand the notes given. Whereas a teacher who does not use this method, and will only explain what is to be said I find is much more easily understood, as when it comes to write up the notes, you can write what you think and not what someone else has told you.

By using this method, I find one can adapt whatever ability one has in English, to rewriting the notes, using ones knowledge. In a way that they can be understood.

(Royston)

Most of the suggestions for improvement pointed to the desire of students to participate more actively in the learning process rather than just remaining as the passive recipients of teacher knowledge. The piece just quoted modestly makes this point. It was made more strongly by other students—often in connexion with their comments on spoken and written language:

In school you do not have to use language to express your opinions a great deal. When you do have to express your opinions it is usually in written form and so you do not gain much experience of actually talking and expressing your opinions to someone else. I think we should have time in school for discussing various topics. As well as gaining knowledge by listening to others, we would also learn to inform others of our knowledge and opinions.

(Deborah)

The social implications of more talking in schools were not missed either. As one student wrote:

The use of language in education also includes the relationship between the teachers and the students.

This notion was implicit in many of the pieces of writing but one student explicitly made the link between more open discussion and a more open relationship between pupils and the teacher. Her reference to the 'natural aloofness' of the teacher seems to me a well-merited rebuke to the traditional transmission model of language:

Unfortunately one still finds that open discussion is not really

> encouraged in schools until the pupil reaches an age when the teacher finds it difficult to suppress discussion anyway. I feel this is sad since a 'conversation' between pupil and teacher helps to break down both the natural aloofness of the teacher and the reluctance of more than half the class to say anything aloud. The sooner this reticence is overcome the better for all concerned and the earlier young people begin to reap a benefit from their ability to make a valid point when they need to.
>
> (Karen)

So far I have been concerned mainly with the students' reactions to their experience of language in school. However, many of the writings expressed a sense of enjoyment of the variety and power of language. It is worth noting that these celebrations of language did not occur where the students were discussing language uses in school but when they were writing in more general terms about what language can do:

> I think you get a great deal of enjoyment out of language because you can communicate with one another. I think life without language would be very dull and uninteresting. Language, oral or written, is a way of letting out your feelings and emotions . . . We are not isolated beings living separate lives—we all have something in common we can communicate. Progress continues because we can work things out together as a team. We can take an interest in life because we can discuss it with others.
>
> (Sheila)

Another student, Jill, in a very expressive piece of writing which moved easily between personal reminiscence and generalisations about language, acknowledged the importance of written language for practical purposes, 'for example, shopping lists, facts in Geography, Sociology or any academic subject', but she went on to say:

> I find written language most useful when writing creatively. I write quite a lot of poetry. This I do purely for myself. It brings back certain moods and feelings, memories of which I am very fond. Being able to write enables me to do this.

Turning to reading, she makes a similar distinction between school language and language to enjoy:

> I love reading books, any kind of book as long as it's in story form and not discussional or scientific or educational.

Jill concluded her writing:

> As I've said before I take language for granted but I enjoy it in all its various forms, and I suppose I wouldn't be able to live without it. It would cut out a large proportion of my own personal enjoyment. I enjoy language on its own whether created by me, or read, or just as a means of communication.

What strikingly emerges from these writings is the awareness expressed by many students of the limited opportunities for a range of language use in school–the dominance of the written language of the pupils and the spoken language of the teacher is recognized and criticized. So is the lack of opportunity for the pupils to express their own views and opinions–even in written form.

Many of these students have no doubt about the value to them of talk for 'working things out', for the enjoyment of 'communicating with each other' and for 'letting out your feelings and emotions'. And the same goes for writing, as we have seen.

In terms of written language these students' writings exemplify what they would like to promote–the opportunity to give their own views and have them taken seriously. More than that, though, it enables them to find out for themselves in the process of doing the writing what they do think. Although this process of discovery could be guessed at in many of the pieces of writing, twice it seemed to surface in the language itself:

> When discussing this subject it brings to mind . . .

and

> Language is technically split up into two sections; verbal language and written language. Both I simply take for granted. But by having looked over the development of those two sections, in me, language has become more important.

Learning through talking and learning through writing are pointed to in the Bullock Report as central operations in language. But the much more active part which pupils will then play in their own educative process must be recognized by teachers. Unless teachers are willing to be communicated with more often as people interested in and concerned by what other people (who happen to be their students) have to say–rather than as examiners or assessors of what has been said–and unless they are willing to allow for genuine discussion and dialogue–rather than just teacher question and pupil answer–then the Bullock Committee has recommended in vain. As one student despairingly concluded:

> Language is highly important but it is not really presented well enough in school.

'A Language for Life', as the Bullock Report was titled, was seen by these students as very different from a language for school. The task is to bring life into school. Perhaps the Bullock Committee should have asked the students how to do this.

This article first appeared in the *Times Educational Supplement* 13.6.75.

THE USE OF GEOGRAPHICAL GAMES IN INTEGRATED STUDIES

Sue Matthews

Games can be a useful tool in any scheme which involves elements of geographical studies. However there are limitations to their use.

Their advantages really centre around their ability to provide variety in the teaching methods used or learning situations available to the pupils and the possibilities they provide for collaborative effort.

Many geography teachers are concerned that pupils should build up a conceptual framework of the subject by taking part in decision making activities. So most games are designed to provide a situation in which the players have to consider several possibilities in a given situation, and decide which they should take. Some device has to be built in so that they are forced to live with the consequence of their actions. For instance, in a game concerned with the growth of settlements, once a group has decided upon a certain site, they would have to stick with that choice even if later they found that was not the best one. Otherwise, they will never gain any benefit from seeing how that decision can affect the outcome.

Games are a means of simplifying reality so that it is within a manageable compass. Frequently in geography there are so many variables that influence any activity that it is difficult for children to appreciate their effect on men's lives, so if a game can show them how one or perhaps two such variables can help

to alter a pattern, then they may gain a better awareness of how patterns of activities emerge. The location of the iron and steel industry has changed over the last 100 years. The factors that have led to this have been successfully demonstrated in Brian Fitzgerald's iron and steel game, in such a way that children at second year level can appreciate them.

One of the beneficial aspects of using games is the amount of discussion that can result. Children become involved in the task presented to them and start asking questions. They wonder why a certain decision has that particular consequence, and this can lead to worthwhile discussion, in which they begin to work out their own ideas and move towards fuller understanding. Discussion like this can indicate how much a group of children have understood the topic and some of the underlying reasons behind decision making.

Frequently, in such a situation, a child who finds it difficult to handle written material can come to the fore because he has grasped the concepts involved and can work out decisions for himself. Often, such children spend much of their time using their wits to compensate for language difficulties and in a group situation they reveal that they are not so bound by conventions as many more bookish children and are prepared to think for themselves. Also, a situation like this provides them with the opportunity to take the lead, which they cannot do in many other types of lessons.

A game can present material in a novel way; much of its usefulness lies in this. Like any other technique gaming can be misused or overused. Unless the game is an integral part of a course then it loses much of its value. Children need to have some knowledge on which to make their decisions. The questions prompted by the game have to be answered by discussion or further research. A game should not be seen in isolation merely as an exercise in manipulating different variables.

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON THE USE OF GEOGRAPHICAL GAMES IN INTEGRATED STUDIES

Elaine Cockbill

Sue Matthews has clearly outlined the main advantages and disadvantages of using geographical games and simulations. In the context of the aims of the weekend discussion at Wansfell, however, perhaps more could be said.

Mention is made of the danger of over-use and mis-use of games. Critics feel that to expose children too often to the simplification of reality on which most games and simulations are based, may impede their structuring of real experience. This danger can be avoided if one *always*, after playing through a simulation with a class, leaves ample time for discussion. This should range from how situations encountered in the game are paralleled in real life, to what the players thought of the results of their actions, and to whether they would have made the same decisions and caused the same responses in an actual situation.

It is during these discussions that the 'concrete operations' used in playing the game can be transformed into 'formal abstractions' about what would happen in real life. In addition, the expressive language prevalent in the actual gaming situation can be encouraged to merge into the more explicit language of theorising–about other possible effects of certain decisions. Children are most likely to do this when they have to explain their view of the situation to the rest of the group. This transition can be seen, fleetingly, in the following example which is taken from a transcript of some girls playing a town planning game.

Aim: to bring children to realise the importance of town planning. Method: each group is given an assignment—to build a housing estate, a factory, a shopping precinct, provide a park etc. and the same map of a fairly small area. After in-group discussion they plot the location of their project on the base map. All decisions are transferred to a master map, when competition and overlap between groups soon soon becomes obvious. As arguments can become very heated, it is best if a teacher can choose two groups with the closest competition and stage a public meeting, with the other groups as audience. The final planning decision can then be based on the outcome of that meeting.

In-Group conversation

Helen: Well *I* dunno where you'd put the park!
Debbie: Well . . . it'd have to have swings and a roundabout, and seats.
Jackie W: I don't think it's that sort of park . . . it's bigger and that.
Helen: Well, it's for people isn't it, so it's got to be near these houses . . . But I s'pose there'd better be room for the houses to grow
[Laughter]
Y'know—more built and things.
Jackie W: If it was near the shops, ladies could have a sit-down.
Helen: Yeah, an' kids could come an' that. Yeh, OK then, put it there.

Master Map

The tape becomes confused when the groups come together to transfer their decisions to the master map.

These three girls were very annoyed about a shopping precinct being in almost exactly the same place they had chosen for their park. They are mainly shouting and attempting to suppress the other group's comments.

Public Meeting

There is an interesting development of ideas from Jackie W while Helen and Debbie are still rigidly arguing for keeping the park where it is. Jackie W suggests, very tentatively, thinking again, but is met with such opposition from the other two that she changes her tack.

Jackie W: Look, couldn't you have the shops somewhere else?
Jackie M: No. Why should we?

Helen: Because we say so.
[General loud argument!]

A little later:

Susan: Shops are better than parks, and you need more.
Jackie W: But you've already *got* shops near there. Put them somewhere else.
Susan: Where, then?
Jackie W: I s'pose . . . *I* dunno!
Debbie: Over the other side.
Jackie W: Yes, or over here, near the park but away from these shops here.

Discussion on applying game to reality

Edith (earlier observer): It was OK but I don't think you'd really be able to stop the shops going there.
Jackie W: Why not?
Sue: Yeah, shops are more important aren't they?
Edith: Well, it happened near us, where we used to go. Well . . . it wasn't a park, just land, but we went there and then they put shops and things there.
Jackie W: But if they didn't know it was like a park . . .
Edith: Yeah, but they see'd us there.
Jackie W: Well, what if you'd said to them not to?
Edith: Oh *yeah!* [laughter].
Jackie W: Well, if you'd told your Dad—or a policeman—No . . . had a meeting, they would've.

The end of the game should be sacrificed if necessary to leave room for such discussion rather than have students finish playing, and leave with an insufficient understanding of the longer-term implications of what they have been doing for the last hour or so. Similarly, when choosing games to play, they should be selected, not for being the 'most exciting game possible', but for being the 'most realistic game possible'.

What I would like to try in the future in a situation like the one I have just described is to pause for a few minutes during the course of the game so that the players could each jot down on paper their thoughts about what seems to be happening and what they feel about it. I would encourage the expressive free-flowing nature of the talk that they have just been involved in

to carry over into their written comments. The pause will also give the participants a chance to stand back and reflect on what could happen next. Thinking onto paper like this would give everybody the opportunity to speculate in relative peace and quiet about the likely outcomes of their decisions up to this point.

In many ways, stopping to consider the implications of the game so far might be more useful than just a winding up discussion, as there would be a built-in need to hypothesize about future possibilities.

It may hopefully also be valuable in the longer term, outside the gaming situation. Early practice at hypothesizing within the simplified reality of a game should be helpful when students are faced with discussing, for example, the development of a railway network or of a depression. Instead of lapsing into the generalized narrative too often found in school geography writing, they may have accumulated sufficient confidence to put forward their own theories and suppositions, based on the evidence before them, as they did in games.

Finally, I feel games and simulations could also have an important role to play—excuse the pun—in widening students' sense of audience. Within gaming simulations, pupils, whether acting out assumed roles or basing their play on their own feelings (the latter is more common with younger children), are addressing a variety of audiences other than the teacher. They may be explaining problems to other children or presenting projects to a 'public authority'. In most games the teacher only acts as umpire, or, in the beginning, as setter-of-scenes. Certainly it would be difficult for the teacher to be seen as examiner, unless he had unfortunately conveyed the impression that he was going to judge how 'well' the game would be played. If these ideas could be effectively transferred to other writing situations, perhaps geography might 'score' more highly than 0% in the expressive mode of writing than it has done in the Project's previous samples!

road as well and near enough to the boundary and also in a row.

Ruth: Yeh, go on.

Caroline: Put one here? That means there's three next to each other.

Jennie: Well it doesn't matter. I mean F3 has three next to each other.

Caroline: Yes, but it's three next to each other on a road.

Jennie: What? Yeh, well . . . see what happens . . . [long pause]. Someone's got to miss out a bit and someone's got to gain a bit because you can't divide it up exactly, of course.

Caroline: Now F1? Settlement . . .

Jennie: F1? We haven't used a lot of this land at the top, have we?

Ruth: Well it's too far out really isn't it?

Jennie: If we give F3 another bad land there then we can spread 2 up there.

Ruth: So what? Spread F1? Why don't we give F3 a bad hill so he can dump all his rubbish on?

Jennie: Yeh, all right.

Ruth: OK, F3 a bad hill.

Jennie: But you don't want it too near all the good land, do you?

Caroline: [irritated] Well put it here, then, put it here.

Jennie: No, because they can use it for something. I mean, if you've got two fields next to each other, if you put one in the middle of one and one in the middle of the other they're not going to affect each other, are they? [Pause] Are they?

Ruth: What are you one about?

Jennie: Well look, you said . . . Look, if they, if you put a bad land for dumping and that near to a good land it won't work, right?

Ruth: It won't work because they'd probably spill something.

Jennie: I know, I agree. So if you've got the two fields like that they're not going to affect each other.

Ruth: Well, but . . .

Wendy: Shall we put one up here, Jennie?

Ruth: You wouldn't be that energetic. You'd be lazy and jump over the fence.

What is said here is virtually welded to what is being done in *that* situation. It is hard for a reader to make much sense of it

because the language is embedded in a particular context. There is no attempt at narrative (or, to put it another way, there is no opportunity for that kind of thing), at generalization, at theorizing, and, apart from Ruth's last utterance, there is little that smacks of the world around these children. Their speech is all strangely remote, peculiarly disembodied from anything that they know or feel. They remain shadowy figures and their task a rigmarole of F1's, F2's and F3's.

What, if anything, of use is going on here? We could say that they are working together (although Wendy merely asks one question); that a kind of 'problem solving' is in progress: that they are being forced to take certain factors into account (distance, water supply, quality of the land, proximity of river and roads); and to justify their statements, reformulate (as Jennie does for Ruth), and take note of what others say. Yet, despite these operations which are of value, there is still no way in which these pupils can approach what the game requires of them from their own lives, their own experience, indeed their own customary ways of speech. At one point they are discussing (hardly the right word in this context) the distance factor and how a farmer would not travel further than he could help from his 'base hexagon' to break in new land:

Jennie: You try walking all that distance, Ruth.
Ruth: I do. Each day. I go home to dinner. I have to go there and back.

A touch of real life! But it only creeps in because Jenny inadvertently provides Ruth with the opportunity to make a connection with her everyday world. In fact, the conditions imposed by the game appeared to prevent anything but 'staccato' utterances firmly aimed at 'getting things done'.

Ruth: I said it was too near the boundary. If the other farms come up here and you've got all your stuff in the middle people are going to start squabbling. They're going to have a fight 'cos they're going to come closer and closer because you're not using that land. So if you use the land they can't fight over it. [All this is said in a breathless, excited tone.]

Jennie: They're still going to fight over it, Ruth.

Ruth: Yeh, but not as much . . . I mean [pause] . . . suppose . . . Here . . . that's not any of theirs so if they put it there they might grow something over the other lands without realising it.

Jennie: [impatiently] Oh, Ruth, there's lots of suppose, suppose and if, if! You've got to be definite. You sort it out first because we don't really understand what you're talking about.

In this context, there seems to be little room for thinking aloud, for musing, for exploring and clarifying ideas with the help of others. The decision-maker here is expected to deal in firm propositions, not slowly work towards understanding. The others are impatient with Ruth because she is not yet clear what she means and are not prepared to act as sounding boards as she talks her way towards clarity; she is shut up with what amounts to a reprimand:

Jennie: What you've got to say are . . . things that are logical you see . . . the thing that we're doing . . . things that are . . . in contact, sensible, to do with it.

From this point on Ruth, who has been trying hard to make sense of the game, becomes surly and confused and remains so to the end.

Why do I have serious reservations about many aspects of 'gaming'? Making a decision about anything is a complex matter, especially if you have no first-hand experience of what you are expected to decide on! Does the making of 'choices and decisions', with which geographers often justify games, take fully into account these complexities (especially in mixed ability situations) or does it lay emphasis on the giving of the decision, fully formed?

As a teacher interested in the role of language in learning I should hope the former, but after listening to the tapes I realized how much the structure of some games called for the latter and discouraged speculation, theorising, and even the expression of half-formed ideas. In the world of snap decision-making

27

these can be viewed as a drawback, an irrelevance. By placing children in such decision-making roles, often devoid of anything that reflects their concerns, it might well be that they are asked to give decisions before they have speculated or hypothesized. The cart is then well and truly in front of the horse. Clearly the above group enjoyed working together and there were moments when they benefitted from each other's help, but in this case the benefits seemed to me to be merely short term and tied to a very narrow context (getting the map filled in). The game was remote from the real world of settling territory, farming and the kind of choices and decisions made by children (and farmers) in real life.

I would argue that simulation must not create a context in which the expressive uses of language are discouraged. Any game is a tool, a means to an end, but the danger is that the geographers, in scaling down reality through games to manageable proportions, also scale down the language opportunity and learning experiences which it is the responsibility of all teachers to foster.

Geographers claim that games demand 'personal involvement' and no doubt some do. If that is the case they must permit children to move from the expressive to the transactional, otherwise they (and it is easy to forget when talking about 'decision making' that these are children engaged in the task of learning, not merchant bankers or business tycoons) are in danger of making decisions without sorting out for themselves why they are making these decisions. It is the so-called objective decision-making (because far removed from the self) which concerns me about many geography games, as well as the danger of premature decision-making which can result from this.

Caroline, one of the girls in the group, commented on the game after a discussion with others in the form:

> I think we've organized it stupidly 'cos we shouldn't have all that good land and no bad land. What's the point of giving them bad land if there's all this good land left?

I want to argue that games (especially those used in the early

learning options. Rather than merely manipulating elements in a mechanistic way they are involved in an act of comprehension which involves using what they already know as a means to explicit new knowledge. They are putting the parts together into a whole through personal action and involvement.

In conclusion it might be said that games chart a move from an awareness of the parts independent of the whole to an awareness of the parts in terms of the whole. It is important that children operate with some such overarching awareness of the whole, and this clearly did not happen on the first tape. I would maintain that for many pupils it can only happen (and games can only be a valuable exercise) if talking and writing options are kept open right up to the point when the choices or decisions are made.

CAN PUPILS BE HISTORIANS?

Adrian Chrismas

"It's not a matter of saying 'It must always be open' but that, if there isn't a large amount of open-endedness at times, we sell the subject short by never letting pupils be historians." (Nick Levine). The same sort of statement could equally have been made about geography, sociology, social studies, or any of the other sorts of things that fall into the 'Humanities' category. But can students of 14 or 15 *really* be historians, do we want them to be, or is it even important or necessary that at some point they should be? Are the sorts of things that they are interested in and the sorts of writing that, left to initiate their own work they will follow, good vehicles for them to be historians?

In the samples of work collected by the Writing Research team 88% of the writing which could be classified as history fell into the category of the 'transactional', 2% in to the 'poetic' and none at all into the 'expressive'. If you believe, and I find it very difficult to deny, that people are history and that as well as the examination of facts it involves looking at feelings, motives and reactions, then both the expressive and the poetic form can portray some part of the knowledge which we usually call 'history'. In my view the poetic and the expressive are the only way in which this particular aspect of man's past can be brought to life and a historical picture created. The folk-songs which arose out of the industrialisation of the 19th century are 'history'. They vividly portray reactions to, approval or disapproval of the rapidly changing life of the working class during that period of time we call the 'Industrial Revolution'. Empathy with the past is one of the most difficult of skills to acquire yet in these accounts written by 5th formers that particular skill is very apparent. They are using the poetic/expressive form to create an historical scene which is meaningful to them and perhaps to their 'audience'.

This first extract was written by Alison about conditions of

life in the trenches on the Western Front in World War I in response to an examination question:

> . . . I feel like a duck in the penny-a-go rifle range at a fayre, parading in an automated circle, waiting to be shot down . . . My home is a trench dug into this ground. There are miles of them, established through the long months of fighting. We have our own shell-proof dug outs, tramways, water pipes and firesteps. With this enforcement there is no hope of a quick victory for either side . . . Outside the rains have transformed the churned-up poisoned land into a maze of miniature lakes which with their tragic reflections make the scene twice as dismal . . .

This piece was called 'Evacuation'.

> . . . The head started talking. I do not remember what he said, but it was something about the terrible fighting and the risk of young children getting killed . . . 'Now we shall all walk to the station, as you leave the hall your name will be called out and you will be given a piece of paper which will have your name on you will then have this tied around your neck so people can see who you are . . .

Both pieces illustrate that a form of writing which comes most easily and most naturally to children can portray accurately and vividly historical events. Both pieces create an atmosphere which can be felt. Arguments about whether this can be 'history' because it is not objective are, I would contend, erroneous, put forward by those who believe that knowledge (particularly historical knowledge) is 'sacred' and only accessible to 'professionals', backed up by the contention that it is possible to be totally objective, to be as Ranke put it 'a reporter of the facts', despite the evidence that historians approach their work with certain theories and a certain view of the world. If the past is to be experienced I would suggest it must have atmosphere, it must include feelings, reactions and motives.

Another part of the historian's job is to research the past. Some teachers say that this is too difficult for children, too technical a task for them, that they cannot look at a medieval manuscript and get anything out of it, that they would not understand it. They may not understand this particular sort of

document but there are sorts of evidence which they can investigate which they will understand–probably the sorts of evidence which they are interested in and which are more relevant to them anyway. People are one resource that is available to students. This extract is taken from a transcript of a tape made by two girls investigating 'Living Conditions'. They visited a local Old People's Home and spoke to three of the residents. What ensued was not an interview but a conversation.

> . . . My old dad had 10 children, he had 13 shillings a week and the rent was free, poor old people years ago who couldn't work got half a crown a week from the parish, 1/6d. a week for rent. They only had bread and potatoes unless someone gave them a rabbit to make a meal . . .

After the conversation they were prepared to transcribe a whole tape (which ran to four sides of A4 paper) and produce a valuable historical document. They then went to various textbooks and other documents to back up what they'd found out, going back to look at working class living conditions in an industrial society.

There are also written sources available which students can use profitably, e.g. School Log Books. Two boys wrote after reading the Log Book of a Board School.

> . . . 1873. In this year people from Waltham Cross was admitted to the Abbey School. Now in '74 Waltham Cross have a school of their own.
>
> 1879. When there was a show on in the area they had a holiday like on Friday 16th of Jan. school holiday for bazaar. This year brought a lot of entertainment to the school.

At another point they wrote, 'The two most important things in the school were conduct and punctuation, prizes were given for those things'. This sort of comment and conclusion was done largely on their own with little comment and conversation with the teacher. They had also chosen to examine 'Education' within the eleven areas which make up the content of the syllabus. If it is their choice even within a situation which is not

completely 'open', in my experience the level of their interest and the way they approach the work improves. One example of this in their project was an account they wrote after talking to a person who'd attended the local elementary school. They took no tape-recorder and made no notes while they were there yet their accounts written after the conversation contain a wealth of detail:

> . . . Some pupils had to walk miles to get to school because there was no form of transport. Some pupils had to walk from Holly Field and from Crooked Mile . . . The salary for an average teacher was for a woman £20 a year and a man £30 a year. On each pupil a year they spent £2 and on books and equipment £10.

Presented with contradictions the students do some thinking for themselves. A group of girls working on 'Education' and seeking to compare teaching methods in a modern primary school with a Victorian board school wrote:

> Some people don't agree with X School's way of teaching they don't think there is enough discipline, we admit it is a relaxed atmosphere up at the school but the children still learn.

A girl working on the sorts of experiences that people in Britain had during World War II looked at the problem of food-rationing. One source she used was her mother's old recipe books. She also came across a comment about food-rationing in a book which went 'but people in Britain were well fed'. To this she responded with:

> . . . but I think that there must have been some that were going hungary.

Her own examination of sources enables her to question the authoritative statement of the text book.

A boy looking at 'Canals in the 18th Century' and having read a lot about James Brindley found himself faced with a contradiction:

> . . . The great name is Brindley, who only in fact build part of two

canals, the Bridgwater and Trent and Mersey, these were unfinished at his death.

I think it's fairly clear that he has seen a contradiction in something he's read and is drawing attention to it.

There is a basis here for discussion and talk between the students and the teacher because it is something new and alive to them, something they have discovered rather than been told to learn, something not 'received'. In any situation where the writing shows the real involvement of the pupil or pupils concerned then there is surely a situation which is alive, a situation in which talk is more likely to occur and another viewpoint come to light.

A fifth year pupil in an open-ended 'Social Studies' course examined the rehousing of his grandparents. There are a good number of historical type comments and statements in this study. In a section headed 'Criticism of the Old House' he wrote:

> Life is those days was not exactly luxurious, with having to have a bath in the old tin tub in front of the old fire. This, my grandma, today remembers well.

At another point he describes the terraced house which his grandparents are being forced to leave because of a compulsory purchase order:

> The present houses on the street are very old dating back towards the late 19th century. The houses themselves are very small. The ground floor consists of the main front room leading into the dining room which in turn leads into the kitchens. The first floor just consists of two main bedrooms separated by the stairs in the middle.

The account is accompanied by two diagrams.

The entire project is a valuable insight into the effects of a decision taken by people in power against which the people affected can do little or nothing, a comparison of different

living conditions, a particular pupil's involvement in history. However if this boy had been in a History lesson his ideas would have had to go in a historical direction and if they didn't they would, certainly in terms of an examination system, have been valueless. Susan, a girl involved in the same 'Social Studies' course, chose to look at 'Old Age' after visiting an Old People's home. It is a statement of her reactions to the places she visited, her ideas on how old people should be treated etc. It is a very personal statement. Such a topic as 'Old Age' is a suitable one for a historical study yet Susan obviously did not want to go in an historical direction. He study shows, however, that here is a situation in which new ideas are being looked at, a situation where her 'world-picture' is being altered.

In setting up closed situations, by having 'History', 'Geography', 'R.E.', 'Physics', 'Chemistry' on a timetable we set up restrictions on the way the pupils thought, ideas and interests may go. We also create a restrictive social relationship in that we are seen not only as teachers but 'history-teachers', 'geography-teachers' etc., a situation in which the pupils will tend to look for 'right' answers, tend to think that 'he' or 'she' will know more about it than I do anyway so why bother, and expect to have information imparted to them. Such a situation will also tend to restrict the sorts of writing that the pupils do. By putting History on the timetable at certain times of the week for a two-year course we seem to expect the pupils always to be Historians for that limited amount of time and at no other. If education has something to do with having control of our own lives, with adapting, altering or reinforcing opinions we hold, then how can this happen if we do not set up situations where we really ask for the pupils' ideas, feelings and reactions to things in which they are interested? We are not all interested in the same things yet we have this notion that if our pupils get a bit of this and a bit of that they will have a wide education, frequently ignoring that they never get involved in more than one or two areas and some never get involved at all. As a history teacher I want to be able to bring my expertise and knowledge to bear in a learning situation which is vital and alive; I want to be in a situation where pupils start with their interests and I want to be able to say, 'Yes, I enjoyed reading this because

you're telling me something new'. If we are in a classroom doing something called 'History' I believe this is less likely to happen. By putting it on a timetable in a two-year C.S.E. course where the pupils have chosen which subjects to do you also cut off from 'History' all of those who did not choose that option. From the examples of writing I've given I would put forward the opinion that children can be historians but argue that if being historians is to be meaningful to their education, then the situation must be 'open-ended': that if we do not have this open-endedness it is not so much a question of selling the subject short but the pupils.

TRYING A NEW APPROACH- A FIRST ATTEMPT AT TAPING IN HISTORY

Graham Allnatt

History teachers would maintain that they have reached a high degree of skill in introducing children to the experience of the past through the written word. According to the Writing Research figures, 88% of the writing of our senior pupils in history is of a transactional nature revealing an overwhelming emphasis on factual content, historical accuracy and the meaningful but objective relating together of events. This would very much imply that teachers feel secure within this framework of writing and perhaps explain the apparent hesitancy that many have for the use of taping and drama in the classroom. Here we are dealing with a freer situation where involvement and personal interpretation comes to the forefront and so often the reaction of the teacher is either to be dismayed by the lack of accuracy and trivial content or alternatively to be uncritically carried away by the initial enthusiasm and interest which is often created.

My main reasons for choosing taping rather than imaginative writing or drama with a 3rd year group of average ability (and no drama tradition) were the high level of involvement expected from this (still) new medium and the hope that the pupils' inhibitions would be dispelled by the anonymity of the tape recorder. In practice most of our pupils preferred this as a starter to their direct experience in recreating the past as our follow up taped interviews showed. They also liked the idea that they could present their work on their own terms, erasing mistakes, and know beforehand that it would be well received

and not risk the chance of failure in front of others. The versatility of the tape recorder was shown by the wider variety of historical 'noises' which could be added and allowed a narrator's part to be put in afterwards to tie the eight three-minute playlets together to form a programme on 'Leaders of Modern Russia'. Quite a few children possessed tape recorders and were at least as skilled as I was in operating them. Tape recording presents its educational problems. The quality of taping often left much to be desired but to the technically minded this was a challenge rather than a deterrent and many children happily redid their taping to improve it whereas a suggested rewriting of work in their exercise books would have had a different reaction. We had our usual share of group disharmony and occasionally 'disintegration' but this too had its value in discussion afterwards with the groups. Some pupils expressed anxiety about the amount of time spent on such a small aspect of the 'course' but this was another lead-in to talking about the time actually spent on producing radio and T.V. programmes.

The playlet considered at our Humanities weekend was one of the playlets on the 'Life of Stalin'. The guidance of the teacher was deliberately limited to suggesting that the pupils pick out two or three important parts of his life and that they should stick roughly to a time limit of four minutes. We were keen to allow the pupils the opportunity to write and develop their own work and not impose our pattern on them. This group chose his early life, life under Stalin in the '30s and his death. A variety of booklets on 'Stalin' and Russian history were available. From the first the groups saw their audience as the rest of the class and tried to introduce material which would interest (and amuse) each other. The 'Stalin' group decided on a script after rejecting amongst themselves the idea of improvised drama as being 'too hard'. They were very keen to stick to their version and when the teacher suggested at one point some amendments they said that they preferred 'theirs'; (they were more ready to accept ideas after they had done the first taping). This was their first effort:

Narrator: [read very quickly—rather staccato] From school, Joseph Stalin won a scholarship at a training college

for priests, but he did not intend to be a priest at all, because this was the only form of education at that time. After he had left . . . he turned into a rebel. But unfortunately he earned many days in the punishment cells. In the end he was expelled at the age of nineteen.

Priest 1: Stalin you are a bad influence on the priests.

Stalin: Why?

Priest 2: By reading the revolution books.

Stalin: It does no harm.

Priest 2: It does though, because it puts ideas into their heads, so I leave.

Stalin: I'll return, I will return as leader of Russia.

Narrator: After he was expelled from priesthood he joined the Bolsheviks, a revolutionary group. The Bolsheviks were sort of men like Stalin who came from poor Russian homes and friends among the workers and peasants. He soon appeared on police files as one of the most dangerous revolutionaries in South Russia. Then Lenin died and Stalin took over power. He died in 1924 at the age of 54. From 1927 or 28 there was no doubt that Stalin was the sole ruler of Communist Russia. Stalin made up a powerful threat of fear by a group of people going round houses accusing people to be [a] threat to the State like the SS. After they were sent to [comm.] [?] labour camps without trial. Stalin's men started to capture people that was against Stalin's plans.

Narrator: ACT 2. Soldiers marching.
[Sound of tramping feet and a knocking noise].

1st soldier: Open this door.

2nd soldier: —or we will knock the door in!

1st person: All right.

2nd person: What do you want?

1st soldier: We're taking you to the camp.

2nd person: Why?

2nd soldier: Because you are [a] threat to the State.

1st person: What have we done to be a threat?

1st soldier: You have made plans to assassinate our leader, Stalin.

Narrator: They struggle—as they did not want to come.
['Struggle' sounds: ouch, aarrgh, sound of beating etc].
[They were] forced to come though because they were overpowered—by the soldiers.
[more tramping feet].
After that they were taken to a train with many other friends and taken off to forced labour camps in Siberia. But some tried to escape but were killed doing so.
In March Stalin was taken bed-ridden.

Narrator: Scene 3—Stalin dying.
[Sound of feet]

Servant: Stalin, there's a doctor to see you.

Stalin: [Groans].

Servant: Come in doctor.

Doctor: I think you have a weak heart. You have not many days to live.

Stalin: [Groans twice—melodramatically].
Dirge like notes hummed by someone.

Narrator: Then Stalin died—5th March 1953 and was buried in a m—.

In questioning the children on tape afterwards about the value of the playlet I was constantly aware of the novelty of the activity and the enthusiasm it generated—the extra efforts they had made and the socialising effect ('it was great fun', a 'new experience', 'Great working together') which they had felt in the preparation and performance of the work. The narrator's information-based commentary was what they (and possibly me at that stage) thought was important and some could give a fairly good remembered version of it and had a relatively sound understanding of the fear-ridden Tsarist society. The vernacular expressive dialogue was only seen as light relief and not really of

value to their understanding of the character of Stalin or the nature of life in 20thc Russia. But it was only the improvised drama (the death scene) in which they *felt* they had been fully involved (and enjoyed) and had conscientiously tried to 'think what they would do' and 'then wrote it out of our heads'. At this stage I was satisfied with their positive enjoyment (especially with eight other groups rushing to show scripts!). The children fortunately were not, but only the follow-up tape showed this.

I soon found that with drama and taped drama, the follow up was absolutely vital. The answers to questions I asked on Stalin himself revealed from this group a dominance of factual recall 'he was expelled from school . . . treated people badly in 30's . . . ' and showed as yet little understanding of character which could be and clearly needed to be drawn out of the playlet. Whereas the group had appeared reluctant to be criticised in the early stages of their writing and taping, listening and talking about their tape afterwards, they were ready to admit the teacher as a collaborator rather than the spectator they had wanted him to be earlier. They were prepared now to rewrite their play in the light of the discussion which was more meaningful because they had undergone the experience and they were now better equipped because their knowledge and experience had been made conscious by the follow up. It is true that in some other groups it appeared from questioning afterwards that the understanding of character and events had developed much earlier in the process of the thinking, planning, writing of their scripts and that the follow up was of less vital importance to them. They had 'finished' and could see no particular benefit from redoing their tape. In a mixed ability situation this discrepancy between groups obviously calls for some awareness and insight as well as adaptability on the part of the teacher.

My fear is that plays and taping as aids to 'reliving the past' are too often half developed gimmicks for history teachers and that we are too often dominated by our own expectations of content and/or too easily satisfied by the obvious enthusiasm of the pupils. We are not sensitive in this area to the

nature of the involvement or the open endedness required for experiential learning to take place. Where we so often end, learning for many is really just beginning.

POETIC WRITING AND THINKING: SOME COMMENTS AND HYPOTHESES

Robert Parker

The students of the five-year study, 'The Development of Writing Abilities 11–18',[1] indicate that as students move up the secondary school they do more transactional writing and less poetic writing. In the sample of writing, taken from 65 secondary schools, 54% of the writing done by first year students was transactional and 17% poetic (stories, poems, plays). By the seventh year 84% of the writing was transactional and 7 % poetic. Although it is risky to generalise these findings to all British secondary schools, it does seem reasonable to say that, with the exception of Religion education, English is the only subject in which poetic writing is widely accepted as a legitimate and important activity. Few teachers of geography, for example, would argue that writing stories and poems is central to learning geography or being a geographer, and the same I think is true for other 'content' subjects.

In fact, if one were to confront most teachers of history or geography or science with the argument that poetic writing is *essential* for learning or practising their subject, they would probably think he was crazy. Most simply wouldn't think about it at all, and those who might want to would have great difficulty. This would be so not because teachers of these subjects are closed-minded or stupid, but because the implicit model of their subject which they have internalised from their training excludes all considerations to this effect. There would be no 'compatible connections' between ideas about poetic writing and their ideas about their subject

The case for English and R.E. is really not as different as it seems. Although teachers of these subjects value poetic writing, the justification given for it is usually phrased in terms of the benefits to self-expression or the appreciation of the beauty and power of language. Like most other teachers, they seldom see poetic writing as central either to *thinking about their subject* or to the *development of thought in general.*

Despite the wide acceptance of this bias, I am convinced that poetic writing involves thinking processes–cognitive operations–which are at least partially, and perhaps even totally, different from the thinking processes involved in transactional writing. I am also convinced that these thinking processes are not relevant solely to English or the arts or the humanities, but are useful in learning across the entire range of organised knowledge–including the typical subjects in the school curriculum. Poetic writing, like transactional writing, can make a unique contribution to the overall intellectual development of individuals, as well as to their thinking about maths or biology or history or whatever. *Together* poetic and transactional writing can provide individuals with a powerful range of life-long 'tools' for learning.

Even if we accept the long-standing notion that poetic writing involves intuition, feelings, imagination while discursive writing involves facts, analysis, logic, we still must confront the possibilities for learning attached to the operation of intuition and imagination in all aspects of education and life. It is an accident of fairly recent Western culture that analysis is valued over intuition and not, I think, something inherent in the nature of thinking itself. Even such a seemingly entrenched rational psychologist as Jerome Bruner now is arguing vigorously for attention in schools to the development of intuition as a primary tool of thought.

> . . . the aim of a balanced schooling is to enable the child to proceed intuitively when necessary and to analyse when appropriate.
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> (*The Relevance of Education*, p.83)

Bruner believes that intuition, or intuitional thinking, provides both the most powerful means of 'problem-finding' and of beginning the process of 'problem-solving'. In his terms we are

more likely to sense a problem, have a hunch about how to get started solving it, and guess at shortcuts to the final solution intuitively than we are analytically. Analysis comes in when we gather more data to check what we have done, correct errors, and develop a coherent proof or theory to present the solution convincingly and economically. Intuition needs to be 'backstopped and disciplined by more rigorous techniques of problem-solving', i.e. analysis.

My concern here is with what I take to be the unique features of poetic thinking, and what follows is a list of hypotheses about the nature and uses of poetic thinking. Admittedly they are crude and overlapping. Nevertheless, I hope they may be useful to researchers and teachers alike in shaping various kinds of experiments or descriptive investigations.

1. Poetic writing tends to force words close to things (see Emerson) by demanding the creation of a 'real' context for its events—a three-dimensionality—which the linearity and thrust toward abstraction of transactional writing casts off.
2. New information is made functional in poetic writing, put to use in making a construct for a purpose, and this functionalism is missing from much of school-sponsored transactional writing.
3. Poetic writing offers empathic possibilities to the writer—living other roles, putting oneself in other people's shoes—and so extends the scope of the writer's sensibility and his grasp of human and natural history in ways that transactional writing does not.
4. Poetic writing encourages the interplay of first- and second-hand experience in the construction of its artifacts. (Transactional writing tends to force those modes of experience apart, which creates the problem of which one pupils should use first and how they should be 'taught' to move from one to the other).
5. Poetic writing necessitates an interaction between the writer and his material which much of the extrinsically motivated 'report' writing in school subjects does not.
6. The basic activity in poetic writing, and therefore in poetic thinking, is metaphor-making; these metaphors are of

different 'size' and 'import', and some take on the universal status of symbols. (Robert Frost said that 'all thinking, with the exception of mathematical thinking, is metaphorical and that poetry best teaches one how to make the connections of metaphor and how far you may ride the metaphor and when it may break down with you'. Bruner says that learning involves making 'compatible connections' between new things and what you already know: of finding the points at which new knowledge fits into the structures of knowledge which your mind has already organised).

7. Poetic writing necessitates the *combined functioning* of certain mental operations which tend to be separated in transactional writing. Operations like classifying, generalizing, speculating, theorizing tend to happen one at a time in transactional writing. The combinatory nature of metaphor forces a simultaneity of these functions.
8. Poetic writing forces a real concern with audience because of its centring in feeling and valuing and thus its inherent personal-ness as a mode of communication. (It also permits the self to be an important audience).
9. Poetic writing engenders a more intense engagement with language: moments in which the writer's unconscious is fused with his consciousness in a process which seems to take the art of writing out of his 'control'.

What follows here is a piece of writing by a fifteen year old girl which I have commented on briefly in the light of some of the hypotheses. It is not intended as a documentation or verification of these hypotheses, but rather as a way of suggesting how this might be done with a much larger sample of poetic writing drawn from subjects across the curriculum.

JO MY FIRST DAY IN THE WORKHOUSE

So this was to be my new home. I looked at the huge building in front of me. I once saw some Army Barracks, and this new home of mine reminded me of them. All around me were high walls, and the gates were guarded. Why? Surely I wasn't going to be locked in? A feeling of nausea gripped at my stomach. Oh God, what have

I done to have to live here? I knew the answer though. The reason I had been sent to this workhouse, was because I'm poor. Surely that isn't a crime?

"You boy, come here," the bellowing voice shattered my thoughts, and I hurried over.

"Come with me, come on, I haven't got all day," he shouted.

Where are we going? Who was this man? Oh, help me someone.

"Here!" he pointed to a wooden door.

I turned the handle nervously. I peered inside and looked away immediately. The sight made me feel sick. Old women and children were crammed together in this filthy room. It was freezing cold and they were all huddled together, trying to keep warm. Oh God, surely I'm not to live here, with all these people.

"Here, put this on," the man who had showed me the way in, thrust a drab pair of trousers and a shirt in my hands. I had to hand my clothes over to him.

"Right, bed," he shouted. Everyone moved quickly, hurrying past this man.

The dormitory where all of us kids had to sleep was filthy, as the the other room. The beds were so close together, there was no room to walk around, or even change. Mice scurried around the room as we all tried to go to sleep on the hard wooden boards. I hadn't eaten that day, and I was freezing. I didn't sleep that night. The stench, hunger, cold and lonliness made me cry most of the night.

At about 6 a.m. the next morning the man, who I later learned was the ward master, woke us up.

The stone floor was so cold, I thought my feet were about to drop off. We got dressed in our uniform, and went to a huge room called the Dining Room. We each had a bowl of gruel and a small piece of bread. Nothing else.

"Move!" bellowed out the man. We quickly ran out of the room.

The next thing was school. I looked forward to this, as I'd always loved school when I lived at home. We marched down the road and into the school gates. I soon realised things would be different. I'd forgotten how we used to ignore 'those workhouse kids.' Forgotten how we'd laughed at them. Forgotten how we'd teased and jeered them. But I soon remembered. Oh yes! Now it was my turn. The taunts of my old friends was more than I could bear. I ran out of school, blindly down the road. I had to get out.

They'd never take me back. I'd die if they locked me in that "prison" again.

I sat crying in this 'punishment room'. I should have known I couldn't escape. I had to spend one whole day locked in the 'punishment room', without food or water. There was no furniture in this room, although there was a tiny barred window. I watched the men at work out of this. They had to do hard monotonous jobs, such as stone breaking, for road making, or picking old rope to make oakum for caulking the planks of ships.

At the end of the day, I was let out of this 'cell' and went to my 'bed'. I talked to some of my work mates. They told me about the workhouse. In one corner a boy coughed continuously. My mates told me he'd die in the night. Sure enough, the next morning he was dead. I was shocked, but everyone took this as a natural occurence. I awoke in the morning, after praying all night, it was a nightmare, to the same neglected, dingy room, to face another day, which would set the pattern of my life, for the next 10 years.

Her description of this day is highly detailed. The workhouse is a 'huge building' with 'high walls', like 'some Army Barracks' she had seen, and the 'gates' are 'guarded'. A bellowing voice shattered her thoughts. She 'turned the handle nervously'. The 'dormitory' was 'filthy' and 'mice scurried around the room'.

This careful depiction of the physical setting, the 'tone' of the place, and her feelings creates a real context for presenting what she knows about workhouses (See hypothesis 1). By actually 'feeling' herself present in this setting and the experience of it, she develops and communicates an empathy with its inhabitants (See hypothesis 3).

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She is interacting intensely with her material, both to come to terms with the 'experience' for herself and to communicate these feelings—this sense of the degradation of people consigned to such a place—to others (See hypotheses 5, 8 and 2).

Because of the intensity of her feelings, she moves her second-hand experience of workhouses gained from books or lectures (or both) *closer* to first-hand experience – making it more a 'virtual' experience of workhouses than she has had before. (See hypothesis 4).

In short, she is thinking very hard about what she has learned in ways that seem to be unique to poetic writing, and in the process her knowledge is transformed. Certainly much of history or geography or classics or science requires these kinds of thinking for the fullest learning to occur. Even more certainly, all people need experience of these kinds of thinking in all areas of their lives if they are to become full, creative, sympathetic human beings.